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ABSTRACT

This paper describes Southwest Texas State University's Communication Lab, which includes a general office, two large rooms with videotaping and playback capabilities, and three rooms with individual computers and is used by students enrolled in public speaking, small group communication, and interpersonal communication classes. The paper presents student feedback on the communication lab during spring 1998. It concludes with suggestions for integrating the communication lab in the teaching of interpersonal communication. (EF)

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The Evolution of a Communication Lab: Lessons Learned, New Visions

Integrating the Communication Lab in the Teaching of Interpersonal Communication

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A Burnette

Overview of SWT's Communication Lab

- **Lab Facilities and Purpose**

Southwest Texas State University's Communication Lab (formally known as the Center for Communication Excellence) has been in operation since 1996. It is located in Centennial Hall, home of the Speech Communication Department. The lab includes a general office, two large rooms with videotaping and playback capabilities, and three rooms with individual computers. Students enrolled in public speaking, small group communication, and interpersonal communication classes use the communication lab to practice, tape, and watch performances; to receive feedback from the lab staff on assignments and performances, and to prepare materials for performances (such as PowerPoint presentations).

- **Staffing**

Becky Mostyn, M.A., serves as the director of the communication lab. The lab is staffed by a combination of faculty members and graduate students. The graduate students who work as lab instructors are chosen from among the department's teaching assistants and their work in the lab constitutes a teaching assistant assignment. The faculty members who work in the lab do so as part of their service assignment. During the Fall 1998 semester the lab has been in operation for approximately 30 hours every week, including some evening hours.

- **Integration with Curriculum**

Although the lab is open to all communication students, the students who use the lab the most regularly are those whose class work requires lab attendance. NCA Associate Director Sherry Morreale argues that involving as many communication department faculty as possible is helpful in running a communication lab (see *Spectra*, October 1998); faculty involvement at SWT has greatly contributed to the success of the communication lab. Faculty teaching public speaking, small group communication, forensics, voice and diction, and interpersonal communication require their students to attend the lab as part of course work. Typically, students who have attended the lab for any class are eager to use the lab for future assignments (see Student Feedback on Communication Lab, Spring 1998, pp. 3-7).

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Student Feedback on the Communication Lab, Spring 1998

Spring 1998 Communication Lab Team:

Ann Burnette, Ph.D., Director and Lab Instructor
Dan Love, M.A., Lab Instructor
Charles McInnis, Lab Instructor
Tricia Phillips, Lab Instructor

Communication Lab Feedback Form:

Name of your Speech Communication course _____

Course Instructor's name _____

Communication Lab Instructor's name _____

Date _____

Please help us serve you better by giving us some feedback on your experience. To preserve your anonymity, please place this form in the designated box in the main office of Media Services (Alkek 108).

1=Strongly Disagree
2=Disagree
3=Undecided
4=Agree
5=Strongly Agree

1. I find the videotaping and playback in the Communication Lab helpful. _____

2. I find the feedback from the Communication Lab instructors helpful. _____

3. Participating in the Communication Lab made me more aware of my communication performance. _____

4. The work I do in the Communication Lab lets me practice what we discuss in class. _____

5. The Communication Lab appointments allow sufficient time to address my needs. _____

6. Time is managed efficiently in the Communication Lab. _____

7. The Communication Lab accommodates my needs in scheduling times. _____

8. The outcome of the lab visit met my expectations for the visit. _____

Other comments:

Analysis of Student Responses to the Communication Lab Feedback Form

OVERALL

Question	1/SD	2/D	3/U	4/A	5/SA	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	3	2	8	42	103	158*	4.52	0.81
2	5	0	0	24	145	174	4.75	0.73
3	4	1	2	34	133	174	4.67	0.75
4	3	3	7	51	110	174	4.51	0.80
5	5	6	11	57	95	174	4.33	0.95
6	4	1	2	56	111	174	4.55	0.76
7	6	10	27	49	82	174	4.10	1.08
8	4	1	2	39	128	174	4.64	0.75

COMM 2330: SMALL GROUP COMM. INSTRUCTOR: WITTRUP

Question	1/SD	2/D	3/U	4/A	5/SA	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	2	2	2	23	28	57	4.28	0.96
2	3	0	0	13	41	57	4.56	0.95
3	2	1	0	18	36	57	4.49	0.89
4	1	2	3	17	34	57	4.42	0.89
5	2	2	4	23	26	57	4.21	0.98
6	2	1	1	23	30	57	4.37	0.90
7	1	5	8	17	26	57	4.09	1.06
8	2	1	0	19	35	57	4.47	0.89

COMM 2338: PUBLIC SPEAKING INSTRUCTOR: BEEBE

Question	1/SD	2/D	3/U	4/A	5/SA	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	0	0	1	12	40	53*	4.74	0.49
2	0	0	0	4	52	56	4.93	0.26
3	0	0	0	8	48	56	4.86	0.35
4	0	0	3	11	42	56	4.70	0.57
5	1	1	3	16	35	56	4.48	0.83
6	0	0	0	14	42	56	4.75	0.44
7	3	4	11	12	26	56	3.96	1.21
8	0	0	0	7	49	56	4.88	0.33

COMM 2338: PUBLIC SPEAKING INSTRUCTOR: LOVE

Question	1/SD	2/D	3/U	4/A	5/SA	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	1	0	5	7	35	48*	4.56	0.85
2	2	0	0	7	52	61	4.75	0.77
3	2	0	2	8	49	61	4.67	0.83
4	2	1	1	23	34	61	4.41	0.88
5	2	3	4	18	34	61	4.30	1.02
6	2	0	1	19	39	61	4.52	0.83
7	2	1	8	20	30	61	4.23	0.97
8	2	0	2	13	44	61	4.59	0.84

*Not all lab activities were videotaped.

Student Comments on the Communication Lab

COMM 2330: SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION
INSTRUCTOR: WITTRUP

- "Great help!"
- "I was very impressed with [lab instructor]. She really helped out our group and was very friendly and offered useful constructive criticism."
- "[Lab instructor] was excellent. She did all the right things by informing us of the truth about our communication behavior."
- "Good stuff."
- "It was helpful because I didn't realize many of the flaws I had so now I can work on them."
- "Extremely cheerful; great feedback; acted like she cared about us, not just another group; excellent."
- "More feedback; video isn't necessary for group--maybe individuals."
- "[Lab instructor] is very helpful. Every time I have to come to the lab, I always try to sign up in her time slot."
- "[Lab instructor] was extremely supportive and helpful. She was very approachable. She discussed the pros and then the cons."
- "Lab instructor was good--efficient. The only thing I think bothered me was that she pointed at us when she spoke; it felt strange. Thanks."
- "I didn't expect this to be as much fun as it was, but I had a good time. [Lab instructor] was a lot of help and related to our panel needs in a way that we could understand. She never personally attacked anyone, and gave great examples on how to better ourselves as a group."
- "The lab was helpful and gave me an understanding of what is going to happen during our discussion."
- "[Lab instructor] was so helpful and positive. She made our presentation so much better and did a great job."
- "I have never done a communication lab before, but after this positive experience I will use it more often."
- "The lab was a great experience. I recommend it."
- "Videotape is very effective."

2338: PUBLIC SPEAKING
INSTRUCTOR: BEEBE

- "[Lab instructor] is awesome!"
- "Very helpful. I really appreciate [lab instructor]."
- "Very helpful"
- "I had to do the speech twice because the first time the record button was not pushed, but that actually really helped me and the lab instructor."
- "It was very helpful and informative. Helped in my understanding of the speech and its organization."

- "This particular session was very effective for me as I was a little unprepared. [Lab instructor] got me on track--boosted my self-esteem as well!"
- "[Lab instructor] was a great help in structuring speech--as well as in presentation."
- "Excellent!"
- "[Lab instructor] was extremely helpful and made a lot of my concerns clear with an effective way to help or prevent them."
- "[Lab instructor] was extremely helpful; she made me feel comfortable with the whole process and gave me some wonderful advice!"
- "Very helpful session; very helpful technique."
- "It helped me a lot."
- "I was upset that we had to go to the lab at first, but once I got there I found it rather helpful. Thank you for the time and effort."
- "My apprehensions were greatly reduced when speaking with [lab instructor]."
- "Would be helpful to have later hours."
- "I am more aware of what my speech will sound like and I liked the unbiased response."
- "I was nervous about the whole comm. lab thing but [lab instructor] made me feel relaxed enough that we could talk tech. and feedback."
- "I felt that [lab instructor] was very helpful and would return to see her. She helped me straighten motivated sequence and gave me many alternate ideas. Very helpful."
- "[Lab instructor] is always very helpful and a pleasure to work with."
- "[Lab instructor] was extremely helpful! This was the first time at a lab session where I felt completely comfortable and could really work on and listen to the suggestions. Overall I like the lab--it does really help prepare me for the in-class speeches."
- "[Lab instructor] has helped me tremendously! As far as organizing, delivery, and what I expect from my speech."
- "Great."
- "Just two comments: (1) It would be great if there were more times (had appointments available in the evening). (2) If it was not mandatory, but an option like Student Learning Assistance Center or the Writing Center."
- "Very helpful, defined strengths and weaknesses well."
- "Always a joy to work with, she provides so much helpful input and information. Thanks, [lab instructor]!"

2338: PUBLIC SPEAKING
INSTRUCTOR: LOVE

- "[Lab instructor] does a great job."
- "[Lab instructor] is very encouraging to me and my speaking skills."
- "[Lab instructor] helps me so much. She tells me exactly how it needs to be changed or doesn't need to be changed (my speech)."
- "[Lab instructor] is excellent. She is a great help!"
- "I find it helpful to go to the same instructor each time."
- "I appreciate [lab instructor's] friendly and encouraging manner."

- "[Lab instructor] was very helpful. She showed me what I was doing wrong and things that I was doing well."
- "[Lab instructor] provided very helpful criticism of my delivery. She also offered suggestions of my content that helps me to get my speech as prepared as possible. [Lab instructor] makes the Comm. Lab a very warming experience and after being nervous at first helped me relax and concentrate. This being my second lab both this semester and with [lab instructor], I find the lab to be a very useful service. Thank you [lab instructor]!"
- "Received good information about how to deliver a speech. Instructor made me feel relaxed and not afraid to ask questions."
- "[Lab instructor] was great. She helped me be more aware of the positives of my speech and how I deliver it."
- "Thanks!"
- "[Lab instructor] gives constructive criticism well. She makes me excited about giving my speech, and having people listen to what I have to say."
- "Very helpful."
- "Instructor was very understanding and helpful."
- "[Lab instructor] is extraordinary. She made me feel at ease and gave me an honest critique of my performance. I will continue to use the speech lab when it is not required."
- "I feel like an hour would be a more useful amount of time, and would allow for more feedback. Thank you."
- "[Lab instructor] makes me excited about what I'm doing. She gives good constructive criticism."
- "[Lab instructor] is excellent. She gave me adequate feedback on my delivery and some hints on making the contents of the speech more understandable. She made me feel more confident about my abilities to perform my speech."
- "Very crowded times."

Suggestions for Integrating the Communication Lab in the Teaching of Interpersonal Communication

- Again, as Sherry Morreale has argued, one of the most important factors in the operation of a communication lab is faculty involvement in the lab. During the Fall 1998 semester, two of the faculty members teaching interpersonal communication required their students to attend the communication lab as part of their course work. The lab is now used by students taking interpersonal communication as well as public speaking and small group communication.
- Because public speaking and small group communication classes often emphasize performance skills, communication lab assignments for these classes often suggested themselves (in public speaking, for instance, it seems natural that a student would practice, and/or tape a speech). Maureen Keeley, Ph.D., and Becky Mostyn, M.A., two faculty members who teach interpersonal communication, generated assignments that students could perform in the communication lab (these assignments are included).
- Dr. Keeley's assignments involved dyadic role-playing designed to highlight and give students a chance to practice specific interpersonal skills. In developing the assignments, Dr. Keeley drew some material from *Communicate! A Workbook for Interpersonal Communication*, 5th ed., published by Communication Research Associates. Students performed the role-play in the communication lab and were taped as they performed the assignment. Students then viewed the tape and offered feedback on their own performances and heard feedback from the lab instructor.
- Ms. Mostyn required students to practice a class presentation on a specific aspect of interpersonal communication. The class presentation could be in any format (lecture, discussion, role-play) that the students chose; students used the communication lab to practice the presentation, tape the presentation and watch the tape.
- The performative nature of these assignments enabled students to take advantage of the communication lab's taping and playback facilities.
- Preliminary data from students in these interpersonal communication classes suggests that they found their communication lab assignments helpful in understanding and further exploring class material. (These data will be processed after the end of the semester.)